



**Al Sacker**, founder of the South East Texas Chapter, died of a stroke November 27, 1979, at age 60. Al's studies included a period at the Juilliard School of Music in New York, studying with Dr. George Liebling, one of five surviving U.S. students of Franz Liszt. He had been organist and choirmaster at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Beaumont for 23 years and organist at the Jefferson Theatre for 30 years. His affection for the 3/8 Robert Morton, the only theatre organ still playing in a Texas theatre, was well known and is largely responsible for the formation of the Jefferson Theatre Preservation Society.

**Kathleen "Kay" Stokes**, the Grand Lady of Canadian Theatre Organ, died on December 14th. In a senior citizens home following the death of her longtime friend, Lillian Brookes, in September 1978, Kay broke her



Kathleen Stokes.

hip in a fall in the home. The operation was a success, but she contacted pneumonia, followed by a cardiac arrest. She was 85.

Born Kathleen Norah O'Connor in Durham, Ontario, she began piano lessons at six. To pay for her music lessons while in high school, she played for silent movies in a St. Catharines, Ont. theatre. Further studies were at St. Joseph Convent and the College of Music in Toronto. Until 1917, she was a theatre pianist, but in that year, she played the organ in the College Theatre, the beginning of a long career as one of Toronto's leading theatre organists.

Theatres in which she played were the Tivoli, Loew's Downtown (her favorite), the Pantages (later Imperial), Uptown and Shea's Hippodrome. Radio shows on CFRB utilized her talents, and in 1937, she began a 22-year run on CBS's *Happy Gang*, a five-day-a-week, 39-week program. It was broadcast coast-to-coast and to the States. Kay played a Hammond on the show; an otherwise all-male production. There were 4,890 broadcasts of the memorable program.

After the *Happy Gang*, Kay concertized and taught. She suffered a quadruple loss in 1951. Her husband, Francis; a son, a grandson, and a brother were all killed in a boating accident. She kept busy as a musician into the seventies. On August 28, 1975, she participated in a reunion of the *Happy Gang* members before a capacity audience at the CNE, playing an electronic for the occasion. Her theme song, "The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise," brought tears to many, who were caught in the nostalgia of the day.

An avid follower of theatre organ revival, she frequently appeared at Toronto's Casa Loma and in Rochester, accompanied by Lillian Brookes, to hear the artists of the day. In 1974, she was inducted into the Theatre Organists Hall of Fame. The writer will never forget this gracious, kindly lady who was in his company on several occasions.

Lloyd E. Klos □

## For The Records



*Manufacturers, distributors or individuals sponsoring or merchandising theatre pipe organ records are encouraged to send pressings to the Record Reviewer, Box 3564, Granada Hills, California 91344. Be sure to include purchasing information (post-paid price, ordering address,) if applicable, and a black and white photo of the artist which need not be returned.*

**CANADIAN CAPERS, Don Thompson playing the 4/22 RTOS Wur-litzer in the Auditorium Theatre, Rochester, N.Y. Phonodisc PHE-6004. \$7.00 postpaid from Pipe Organ Presentations, 112 Sumach Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5A-3J9**

Don Thompson probably has more record releases out than any other organist, past or present. He is easily one of the most energetic of the present generation, and he probably earns more bread through record royalties than any other organist, by his own admission. A mere record reviewer can't argue with such success, so Don has got to be doing something right.

The British-trained organist is also voluble in explaining his aims, so reviewers will not misinterpret his efforts. He dismisses "elegant, refined playing with tasteful registration, as it was 50 years ago" because "the public today, and more ATOS-ers than you know about, could not care less about these qualities." So, Don produces what he knows will sell — strict tempo tunes ("... there





Don Thompson. He has a viewpoint.

is no time for subtlety of registration or harmony. One's whole concern is to keep the tempo going.") Don has come out in favor of strict tempo music for the public after years of playing concerts in many lands, and selling records. We cannot discount his conclusions without fair deliberation based on a hearing of his new strict tempo release.

But be warned — it is not theatre organ music in the strict sense, although it is played on one.

Each selection or medley is marked with the bars-per-minute adhered to (BPM). For example, Don plays the British-style "Quicksteps" at 52 BPM. Fox trots are played at 30-31 BPM, Tangos 34 BPM etc. Don has generally shown great ingenuity in selecting tunes well adapted to strict tempo presentation. His quicksteps include: "Exactly Like You," "Beyond the Blue Horizon," "The World is Waiting for the Sunrise," "On the Good Ship Lollipop," "Animal Crackers in My Soup," "Canadian Capers," "South" — all at 52 BPM. Fox Trots (30BPM) include: "Canadian Sunset," "Honey," "If I Had You," "New York New York," "Nadia's Theme."

There are two "modern waltzes" — "Sleepy Lagoon," "You Light Up My Life" (31 BPM) and two tangos — "Jealousie" (sic) and "La Cumparsita" (34 BPM) — and two "old time" Viennese Waltz medleys (60 BPM).

What's the critical verdict? For Don it works out very well. If he can sell such "ballady" tunes as "You Light Up My Life" and "Nadia's Theme" in unbroken tempo, the rest of the program is easy sledding. Don manages the task easily and with finesse. No more problems with harmonic structures, an area where

Don and reviewers have come to blows previously. We can declare this to be Don's best effort within our memory. The quicksteps sound a bit corny in spots to these frazzled tympani, but Don says they sell records, so what the heck!

In all seriousness, despite his claims that just about everything has been sacrificed to tempo, Don was able to inject considerable entertainment value in this first "disco" release (unless all those recorded by Reg. Dixon at Blackpool in dance tempos also qualify).

The Rochester Theater Organ Society 4/22 Wurlitzer is one of the best recording organs and it gives a good account of its many facilities under Don's guidance. He manages plenty of registration changes through the numbers, and the listener is generally unaware that he is controlled by a metronome on the console.

Don states, "I produce fun, exciting records, generally unsubtle."

Agreed!

**PETER STREET PARADE, Doreen Chadwick playing the Wurlitzer organ in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, Acorn (stereo) No. CF280. Available from Tom E.K. Herd, 8 Ashworth Court, Frenchwood, Preston PRI 4PS, Lancashire, England. Price not stated.**

This is another recording produced by the well-known Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust, a club which has saved 14-rank and a 20-rank Wurlitzers (one is heard on this disc) from closed Manchester theatres, partly with the income earned by records released in this Acorn Series. To date the series has maintained a high standard of quality, musically and technically.

Doreen Chadwick is one of the most popular gal organists in Britain. She was discovered by Reginald Foort playing in a theatre in her native Wales, and has done much BBC-casting as well as concerts for the British organ clubs. 1979 ATOS Conventioneers had a very brief opportunity to sample her stylings when she was a somewhat hasty replacement for Ramona Gerhart who bowed out. She played well on a modest 10-rank college Wurlitzer. The only distraction from her music



Doreen Chadwick. Her 'Fats' is tops.

(John D. Sharp Photo)

was a tendency to "wiggle," according to some grumps who somehow confuse the "jiggle" of "Charley's Angels" with the bodily motion of some organists while playing.

The organ has an appealing sound in its current home, and Doreen knows how to get the most from it, although we would prefer less of the "trem on-trem off" practice.

The tunes as listed on the jacket are confusing as some of the 17 selections are contained in medleys, and some are not listed at all. For example, the first selection is listed as "Everything is Beautiful," yet, liberally interspersed are churchly allusions to "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys are Marching" which must be an inside joke not explained to auditioners. "Beautiful" seques directly into "Put Your Hand in the Hand," a tune of very like construction but with far different implications. In the same manner, "Try a Little Tenderness" is merged with "How to Handle a Woman," an association which is readily understandable.

"Singing Piano" is an interesting ballady novelty tune, even though the piano stop sounds more like a xylophone, devoid of effective sustain. "Tarantella" from *The Godfather* is a typical, fast-moving folk dance, well executed. Doreen turns on the schmaltz effectively for "Feelings" and closes Side 1 with a rousing rendition of Perez Prado's once popular "Mambo Jambo." It's one of her best numbers, with lots of trem-off brass and a brief piano lead.

Side 2 opens with an energetic arrangement of Duke Ellington's "Caravan," which comes off well despite the inclusion of the traditional midway cooch dance, the one



immortalized in an early Mickey Mouse cartoon with the advice, "It's a bum old dance, keep your money in your pants." Amen!

"Play Gypsy, Dance Gypsy" is perhaps the weakest selection on the disc. It is played slowly and hesitantly as though being sight-read for the first time. Doreen misses entirely the light and impish Zigeuner spirit composer Emmerich Kalman wrote into it. "Carnival" from *Black Orpheus* comes off much better, with the excitement of the production intact.

What comes next is pure delight. One thing Doreen does better than anyone else we know of is recreations of Fats Waller's organ stylings. Here her trem-off inclinations fit (Fats played many of his organ records on the church organ in RCA-Victor's Camden studio). Although the jacket notes fail to document it, Doreen plays a five-tune medley of selections coming as close to the Waller organ style as we've heard on records. Two of them are Waller originals, "Ain't Misbehavin'" and "Honeysuckle Rose," but there are also "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write

Myself a Letter," "My Very Good Friend the Milkman" and "When Somebody Thinks You're Wonderful," all presented in the ingratiating style of that great entertainer who didn't have to utter a word to project his dominant personality. On the strength of these performances, we would like to suggest a "Doreen Plays Fats" album. His fans are legion and his organ work is neglected.

Doreen closes with a brief rendition of her broadcast theme.

Because of the many reservations noted with regard to the music presented we listened to another recent Chadwick album to help retain as much objectivity as possible in an area where subjectivity is often the rule. We auditioned *Doreen Chadwick, Princess of the Theatre Organ* (Doric DO 1415), played on the Edmonton Regal Theatre's 4/14 Christie organ. This presents a much more confident Doreen, and the Christie would seem to be a more effective instrument for her style of presentation. The trem-off passages seem to mix with trem'd combinations better. After hearing her performance

on the Christie we would venture a guess that she had insufficient time to get acquainted with the Free Trade Hall Wurlitzer. That could explain the pedal clinkers heard on the Acorn disc.

Val Drinkall's biographic notes are okay, but the tunelist is loaded with inaccuracies. Recording is good. Sorry we can't provide an exact postpaid mail order price. The most recent Trust album reviewed here listed the price at \$8.50 (checks on US banks accepted when made out to the Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust).

**THE ROARING '20s, played by George Wright on the San Francisco Fox Theatre 4/36 Wurlitzer. DO 1418 stereo. Available by mail from Doric Records, Box 182, Monterey, California 93940. \$5.95 postpaid plus \$1.00 postage and handling per order (not per record) in the USA.**

This album is a reissue of considerable historical and musical value. It was recorded about 20 years ago and released on the Hi-Fi label. That was

## Dennis James 1979-1980 CONCERTS



August 22, 1979 Ohio Theatre, Columbus, OHIO  
 August 30, 1979 Palace Theatre, Marion, OHIO  
 September 13, 1979 Michigan Theatre, Ann Arbor, MICHIGAN  
 September 15, 1979 I.U. Auditorium, Bloomington, INDIANA  
 September 30, 1979 Ohio Theatre, Columbus, OHIO  
 October 20, 1979 Paramount Theatre, Cedar Rapids, IOWA  
 October 26, 1979 Dort Music Center, Flint, MICHIGAN  
 October 27, 1979 Ohio Theatre, Columbus, OHIO  
 October 28, 1979 Ball State U., Muncie, INDIANA  
 October 29, 1979 State Auditorium, Evansville, INDIANA  
 October 30, 1979 Taylor University, Upland, INDIANA  
 October 31, 1979 I.U. Auditorium, Bloomington, INDIANA  
 November 10, 1979 Redford Theatre, Detroit, MICHIGAN  
 November 11, 1979 State Theatre, Kalamazoo, MICHIGAN  
 December 9, 1979 ATOS Chapter, Miami, FLORIDA  
 January 10, 1980 Keyboard Concerts, Laguna Hills, CALIFORNIA  
 January 13, 1980 Civic Auditorium, San Gabriel, CALIFORNIA  
 January 20, 1980 Captain's Galley, Redwood City, CALIFORNIA  
 January 27, 1980 Grant Union, Sacramento, CALIFORNIA  
 February 2, 1980 I.U. Auditorium, Bloomington, INDIANA  
 February 10, 1980 1st Congregational Church, Columbus, OHIO  
 February 18, 1980 Casa Loma Castle, Toronto, CANADA  
 March 8, 1980 Forum Theatre, Binghamton, NEW YORK  
 March 14, 1980 Dort Music Center, Flint, MICHIGAN  
 March 23, 1980 ATOS Chapter, Atlanta, GEORGIA  
 April 12, 1980 Embassy Theatre, Fort Wayne, INDIANA  
 April 19, 1980 Auditorium Theatre, Rochester, NEW YORK  
 April 21, 1980 Oriental Theatre, Milwaukee, WISCONSIN  
 April 23, 1980 Chicago Theatre, Chicago, ILLINOIS  
 April 25, 1980 Ohio Theatre, Columbus, OHIO  
 April 26, 1980 Gray's Armory, Cleveland, OHIO

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during a period when the resurgence of interest in the theatre organ was burgeoning rapidly. It was all new, especially the improved recording quality (over the old '78s) of an instrument difficult to capture in grooves. Emory Cook had pioneered on the East Coast with his Reg. Foort series played on the Richmond Mosque Wurlitzer. Richard Vaughn was not far behind with his Hi-Fi label. The first George Wright organ release by Hi-Fi created a sensation among enthusiasts of the mid '50s. It was played on the 5/21 Wurlitzer from Chicago's Paradise theatre,

which had been installed in the Vaughn California residence, the instrument heard on most of the Hi-Fi/Wright recordings. But for this release, Vaughn moved his 3-channel equipment to San Francisco's Fox movie palace. The organ there was familiar to Wright, who had played it for special events, previews and spotlight solos during the World War II years.

Selections: "Charleston," "Song of the Wanderer," "That's A-Plenty," "It Happened in Monterey," "Toot Toot Tootsie Goodbye," "Then I'll be Happy," "You're the Cream in My Coffee,"

"Mississippi Mud," "You Do Something to Me," "Laugh Clown Laugh," "I Wanna Be Loved by You," "Just a Memory," "Varsity Drag."

The reader may wonder whether he needs the Doric re-issue if he already has his coveted Hi-Fi original. It isn't a difficult decision. Chances are, the 20-year-old pressing is a bit scratchy by now. But even if it is "mint" there's another set of factors. The state of the transference art (from tape to pressings) has seen much progress over the years. The original tapes were made with an ear to the future in 3-track stereo, rather than the more usual 2-track. That made it easier for Doric to remaster and re-equalize the music to take advantage of today's pressing techniques. A comparison on even a "medium-fi" playback will reveal the greater presence in the music on the Doric re-releases.

We can't describe the arrangements and performances as "vintage George" because he sounds about the same today, whether on records or in person. He has consistently maintained a high standard of musicianship over the years and this disc provides excellent examples of his playing. One thing we noted in reviewing the disc is the difference in time he devotes to rhythm tunes as opposed to ballads. For the jazz tunes, George says all he wants to usually in two minutes or less. The ballads get more time, three or more minutes. The Fox organ in the hands of this master glitters audibly.

Doric gives much attention to packaging. Hi-Fi rarely provided much information in its jacket notes. Doric supplies detailed lore about George, notes about the music, its writers, registration used, history of the theatre and its organ. A uniform design, including a photo of the then Vaughn console, has been adopted for the front cover for the entire series of re-releases. A previous release, *Showtime*, played by Wright on the same instrument, is also available (DO 1417 stereo).

If the reader enjoys the music of George Wright playing one of the great Wurlitzers, enough said. □

*The Pipe Piper, originally planned to appear in this issue, will be in the April-May issue. Hope you can wait.*

